



Podcast: On TRAC to Rebuilding Themselves

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Hammering nails and metal banging. Women talking.

Narrator: Women in reflective orange vests hammer nails and carry metal sheets of rebar. This part of the yard at Mission Creek Corrections Center for Women in Belfair, Washington looks more like a construction site than a prison. But that's the intent of the prison's newest program.

Guitar rock music.

Narrator: Trades Related Apprenticeship Coaching, or TRAC for short, gives incarcerated women hands-on training in carpentry, cement masonry, trade labor and iron work. By the time they complete the sixteen-week course, they'll have the skills to join unions in each of these trades when they leave prison.

Music fades out.

Narrator: That's the plan for thirty-two year-old Jamie Spies. She's part of the very first group of incarcerated students in the program, which began in January. Come June, she'll be completing a prison sentence on a drug charge. Now she's eager to find a job with a trade union.

Sound of hammering nails.

Inmate Jamie Spies: I wanted to be able to step out of here and know what I'm doing when I get out and have my foot in the door. Doing this just lets me know that I wanted to stick through this because this stuff is not easy. It's hard. But I

ended up loving it. And I can't wait to get out and take all my skills and put them into the trade that I choose.

Narrator: Besides the labor-intensive skills, the women learn soft skills like interviewing and ways to cope with stress in the workplace.

Women singing to the tune of "My Girl" amid construction sounds:

Women: When it's cold outside, I've got the month of May. I say, you say, what can make me feel this way? Rebar! Rebar! Tallkin' 'bout rebar. Rebar! Woo!

Narrator: Although this class is the first of its kind at Mission Creek, TRAC has been operating at the state's other women's prison—the Washington Corrections Center for Women in Gig Harbor—since 2000.

Soft guitar music fades in.

Narrator: Program officials say several women from that program have successfully gotten jobs in the trades after leaving prison. Buffy Henson is one of them. She's a project engineer at Custom Source Woodworking in Olympia.

Buffy Henson: I learned a lot about myself. I learned I was worth a lot more than what I was giving myself credit for.

Narrator: Henson's been to prison three times since 2007—on drug and identity theft charges. The last time she went to prison—in 2015—she took a chance on TRAC. And it paid off. Three days after her release in 2016, she got an entry-level job at the company filling glue bottles. And quickly promoted. She says TRAC is what kept her from going back to prison again.

Buffy Henson: TRAC was just life changing for me. I pushed myself harder than I ever had before. Mentally. Spiritually. I just finally wanted enough change that I was willing to do it. It's an awesome program. I'd recommend it for anyone.

Narrator: Rachel Friederich, DOC Communications.